

For Immediate Release

Jan 14, 2016

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**Florida House Passes Priority Legislation Regarding
Comprehensive Water Policy, Education and Persons with Disabilities**

Tallahassee, Fla.—The Florida House today passed three priority pieces of legislation relating to comprehensive water policy, educational options, and pathways to economic independence for persons with disabilities with overwhelming bipartisan support.

“With the passage of these three bills, we have completed a productive first week of session for Florida families,” said Speaker Steve Crisafulli (R-Merritt Island). “I thank Representative Caldwell, Representative Fresen, Senator Gaetz and President Gardiner for their hard work and dedication to these important issues. By protecting our natural resources, empowering individuals with disabilities and expanding education options for students and schools, we are creating a stronger future for Florida.”

“In passing the comprehensive water bill, we will modernize our existing water policies and use responsible, science-based solutions to tackle water-quality and water-supply challenges across Florida,” said bill sponsor Representative Matt Caldwell (R-North Fort Myers). “This bill represents years of development and input from stakeholders on every side of this issue. A comprehensive approach to water will result in our ability to protect our state’s most precious resource from crisis.”

Caldwell, who is also the sponsor of CS/HB 7003 said, “I was honored to work with President Gardiner and members of the Senate to strengthen pathways to economic independence for persons with disabilities. By passing this bill, we will make it easier for Floridians with disabilities to achieve economic security and success.”

In addition to these two bills, the House also passed SB 672, which expands educational options for students and schools.

“With the passage of SB 672, we are creating safer, more focused learning environment for students by incenting school districts to adopt uniform policies,” said Representative Erik Fresen (R-Miami). “The bill will help families of students with disabilities to provide a more customized education experience that meets the unique needs of their children and helps students with disabilities to obtain a college education.”

CS/CS/SB 552 was developed with input by a wide array of environmental, business, and agricultural leaders such as Audubon Florida, the Everglades Foundation, the Nature Conservancy, the H2O Coalition, the Florida Land Council, the Florida Agriculture Coalition, Associated Industries of Florida, the Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association, the Florida

Realtors, the Florida Association of Counties, the Florida League of Cities, the Florida Chamber of Commerce, the Florida Farm Bureau, the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association, Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and a host of Republican and Democratic legislators.

CS/CS/SB 552 makes a number of revisions to Florida's water policy. It creates the Florida Springs and Aquifer Protection Act to expedite protection and restoration of the water flow and water quality in the aquifer and Outstanding Florida Springs. It ensures the appropriate governmental entities continue to develop and implement uniform water supply planning, consumptive water use permitting, and resource protection programs for the area encompassed by the Central Florida Water Initiative. The bill updates and restructures the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Act to reflect and build upon the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) completion of basin management action plans (BMAP) for Lake Okeechobee, the Caloosahatchee Estuary, and the St. Lucie River and Estuary, DEP's continuing development of a BMAP for the inland portion of the Caloosahatchee River watershed, and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' implementation of best management practices in the three basins. The bill modifies water supply and resource planning documents and processes in order to provide more robust representations of the state's water needs and goals.

The Office of Economic and Demographic Research will be required to conduct an annual assessment of water resources and conservation lands. In addition, the bill requires DEP to publish an online publicly accessible database of conservation lands on which public access is compatible with conservation and recreation purposes and requires DEP to conduct a feasibility study for creating and maintaining a web-based, interactive map of the state's waterbodies as well as regulatory information about each waterbody.

CS/HB 7003 addresses the employment and economic independence of individuals with disabilities. It Modifies the definition of "developmental disability" to include Down syndrome, modifies the state's equal employment policy to provide enhanced executive agency employment opportunities for individuals who have a disability and creates the Employment First Act, which requires certain state agencies and organizations to develop an interagency cooperative agreement to ensure a long-term commitment to improving employment outcomes for individuals who have a disability. The bill creates the Financial Literacy Program for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities (Literacy Program) within the Department of Financial Services (DFS) to promote economic independence and successful employment of individuals with developmental disabilities by providing information and outreach to individuals and employers and creates the Florida Unique Abilities Partner Program (Partner Program) to recognize business entities that demonstrate commitment, through employment or support, to the independence of individuals who have a disability.

The bill makes several appropriations to fulfill the requirements and implement the programs created by the bill. Specifically, for fiscal year 2016-2017, the bill appropriates \$138,692 in recurring funds and \$26,264 in nonrecurring funds from the State Personnel System Trust Fund to the Department of Management Services and authorizes two full-time equivalent

(FTE) positions with an associated salary rate of 92,672 to implement provisions relating to the state's equal employment policy. It appropriates \$74,234 in recurring funds and \$14,051 in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund and \$64,458 in recurring funds and \$12,213 in nonrecurring funds from trust funds to Administered Funds for distribution among agencies to implement provisions relating to the state's equal employment policy, \$69,570 in recurring funds from the Insurance Regulatory Trust Fund to the DFS to implement the Financial Literacy Program for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities and \$100,000 in recurring funds and \$100,000 in nonrecurring funds from the Special Employment Security Administration Trust Fund to the Department of Economic Opportunity for the purpose of funding the development, implementation, and administration of the Partner Program.

SB 672 creates the "Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program Act" to increase independent living, inclusive and experiential postsecondary education, and employment opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities. The bill also establishes a process for postsecondary institutions in Florida to voluntarily seek approval to offer a Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program (FPCTP) for students with intellectual disabilities; and creates the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities (center) to serve as the statewide coordinating center for the dissemination of information regarding programs and services available to students with disabilities and their families.

The bill creates the "Students Attired for Education (SAFE) Act" and enumerates the benefits of a standard student attire policy and consequently removes the requirement that school boards individually make such findings. The bill encourages district school boards and charter schools to enact a policy requiring standard student attire in at least kindergarten through eighth grade by providing immunity from civil liability based upon adoption of the policy and providing additional funds to school boards that enact a standard student attire policy. Funding of \$10 per student in kindergarten through eighth grade is provided for qualifying districts.

The 2014 Legislature renames the Florida Personal Learning Scholarship Account (PLSA) program to the Gardiner Scholarship Program. This scholarship will enable parents of students with disabilities to customize their child's education. Parents can request and receive a scholarship that can be used to purchase a wide range of services. Scholarship accounts are established by eligible nonprofit scholarship funding organizations (SFO), and parents are reimbursed for instructional materials, curriculum, and approved services. The bill includes a number of provisions that increase access; strengthen accountability, and streamline administration including increasing the pool of eligible applicants by expanding the definition of autism to include all students on the autism spectrum disorder, and including students who have muscular dystrophy and 3-and 4-year-olds who are high-risk.

The bill appropriates a total of \$95.3 million from the General Revenue Funds for the 2016-2017 fiscal year. The bill provides \$73.3 million (\$71.2 million for scholarships and \$2.1 million for program administration) for the Personal Learning Scholarship Accounts Program, \$14 million for the Standard Student Attire Incentive Program and \$8 million for the Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program (\$1.5 million for the Florida Center for

Students with Unique Abilities, \$3 million for start-up grants, and \$3.5 million for scholarships).

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